

A Step Away From the Throne?



Born: Between 1740 and 1758

Died: May 8, 1819

King Kamehameha I, also known as Kamehameha the Great, was the head of a dynasty (a succession of rulers from the same family) that ruled the Hawaiian islands for more than a century. Legend has it that he was born at the time of the appearance of Halley's comet and that this was a sign that he would rise to greatness. The name Kamehameha (pronounced kuh-may-ha-may-ha) means "the one set apart."

Airman Monica Wong, 90th Missile Security Forces Squadron, got to the bottom of this rumor by sitting down with Col. Evan Hoapili, 90 SW commander. Here is what her interview revealed:

W: There is a rumor that you are related to royalty. Is that true?

H: Yes it's true. My original family name was Ulumaheihei. In the late 1700s, King Kamehameha was the first king to unify all of the Hawaiian Islands under the rule of one person. After he unified all of the islands, he appointed war chiefs that worked for him. One of those was Ulumaheihei, my relative. A year after unifying the islands, establishing a court system, and so forth, King Kamehameha was on his deathbed. The way the superstitions work with the Hawaiian people, especially back then, is that any personal possession has to be very protected. If your enemy were to get a hold of it, they can do very bad things to you. Even after you are dead, if your enemy gets a hold of anything, including your bones, they can do something to you in your afterlife. So, as King Kamehameha was on his deathbed, he had to decide who was to take care of his personal belongings and who was to bury him. Most of the people on his court were looking for what they can get out of his death. Except for one person, Chief Ulumaheihei. King Kamehameha was aware of Ulumaheihei loyalty toward him. He gave Ulumaheihei the honor of burying him in a secret location that only he would know. Also at that time, he gave Ulumaheihei the name Hoapili, which is a name of royalty and trust. I have been able to confirm all of this through my own research and by talking with my grandmother. However, my grandmother tells the story even further.

W: What is the story that your grandmother tells?

H: My grandmother says that they have mounted expeditions to find King Kamehameha's burial site. According to her they have been unsuccessful, but I don't know if that is true. She also says that the legend states that the secret of where king is buried is passed down from first son to first son. I am the first son of my generation.

W: So do you know where his is buried?

H: No, unfortunately. About three generations ago, my relative who held the secret, caught a religion in the 1800s where he was to renounce all of his worldly possessions. He gave up all of his possessions and most of his land. In fact, you can find some of what he gave up at the Bishop Museum in Hawaii. He was killed in a train wreck before he could pass down the secret. So, he was the last son to be buried as royalty.



Hoapili, Trusted Companion

Ulumaheihei was one of the most respected of the king's advisors, yet he boasted no outward trappings of his status. Impressed with Ulumaheihei's humility, Kamehameha bestowed on him a singular honor and responsibility—the proper disposal of his bones after death. He wanted to ensure that, like the bones of other great chiefs, his remains would be laid where they could never be found and desecrated. He did not want to suffer the same fate as his father, Keoua, whose final resting place was well known—the sacred cliff at Ka'awaloa. Kamehameha told the chiefs: "I shall not be hidden from sight after death by any of you, for here all of you are wearing the remains of your deceased chiefs in the symbols of rank that you so openly display. There is Ulumaheihei, ku'u hoapili [my close and faithful companion]. It is he alone who is to conceal my bones after I die." Thereafter, Ulumaheihei was called Hoapili in recognition of Kamehameha's high regard for him.